

Ms. Kathy Kross, Nightline
ABC-TV News
1717 DeSales St.,
Washington, D.C. 20036

1/30/92

Dear Kathy,

Our letters crossed but at least I now have the ks and cs straight.

I do appreciate your letter, even though I disagree with parts. You say that "an unfortunate reality of television is the constrictions that time places upon us." May I suggest that this is a TV person's special concept, making the commonplace special as it relates to TV? How is it in any real sense any different than the constrictions upon me in 1929-1930 when I edited and made up my high school paper? I could not get an additional line of type in and TV can't get an additional word in. The problem is the same. As it was many years later when I did radio news. That time was as inflexible as TV's almost all the time.

I suggest also that the problem was not of time but of selection, how the show decided to use the time it had. Of course it has the right to make this decision. But what it decided to use and not use is other than I was led to believe was the show's purpose.

You marked one sentence in the ^{third} ~~second~~ Koppel graf on page 1, I presume to call to my attention that he said what you thought I had referred to in my letter. In quoting the entire paragraph I'll put it inside parens and then comment:

"Indeed, if Oliver Stone, the film-maker, had produced a documentary rather than a feature film, he would have been expected to observe a similar discipline) ["Prove it. Substantiate it. Document it...." quote^d from the second graf.] In filmmaking that is called 'artistic license.' In statecraft, it's called 'propaganda.' Either way, it carries a lot of impact."

Sorry, I omitted the sentence you underlined: It goes after "discipline" above:

"Instead he produced a film in which he simply made up what he couldn't prove or substantiate."

Nightline knew that at the very beginning Stone announced that his film would be non-fiction, that it would record their history for the people, telling them who killed their President, why and how. After he got my first letter he wriggled a bit when he believed he should but he never abandoned the claim that his movie was factual. In an interview I believe after he finished the editing he told that ~~reporter~~ reporter that he yielded to nobody on fact. He referred to himself repeatedly as an historian. He used every trick he could to convince the world that his film would be faithful to fact in even the finest detail, as with the well-publicized hassle to get to use the TSBD building when he didn't ^{need to} ~~at all~~ and even shot the Dallas emergency room ^{scene} in New Orleans.

And after all the publicity, which is what he wanted, he did not use the sixth-floor, which he had insisted very publicly complete ^{re quired} fidelity, ^{need} his intent, ~~required the sixth floor~~. Having gotten the deceptive publicity consistent with his recording non-factional history, he quietly used the seventh.

If Stone had not gotten himself all that international publicity on his painstaking factuality regardless of cost, if he had not announced that he was recording our actual history, he would have had the right to say anything he wanted. But he did do and say what I say as Nightline, I am confident, knew. I certainly have the documentation.

The language Koppel used is Stone's later representation, after he began to get clobbered, after I told him what he did not deny, that he would be producing a fraud and a travesty. Meanwhile to the end also saying the exact opposite.

So, Nightline and Koppel became Stone's apologists, his propagandists, his advertiser.

Koppel's language that I quote from the beginning of his third graf deceived and misled the audience. I think using "documentary" serves this purpose, too, because although Stone never used the word he certainly did boast that he would be recording history and that factually.

The show's title is "The JFK Assassination Files." Most wasn't on this and when the show was over the audience had no idea what "the JFK assassination files" are or what of them is available or what isn't or why.

If Nightline had really done a show justifying the title it would have been a more interesting program by far and it would have been useful in informing people who instead only too often ^{were} ~~be~~ doused with irrelevant propaganda. It could also help the current debate which remains confused and confounding. To say nothing of serving narrow and personal rather than national interests.

Thanks for taking the time for your letter and for it. I hope that perhaps you may now have a better understanding of why I began by saying I want nothing more to do with these kinds of pseudo-news shows and have used I prefer for the time they take.

Best wishes,

Harold
Harold Weisberg

Thanks also for your good wishes and offer of help. I do appreciate both and what they reflect. I'm so very sorry the

show was not in accord with what you, personally, were so clearly aiming for, an informative presentation of fact. I do respect that, as I hope I indicated in my first letter.